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Henry M. Whitney

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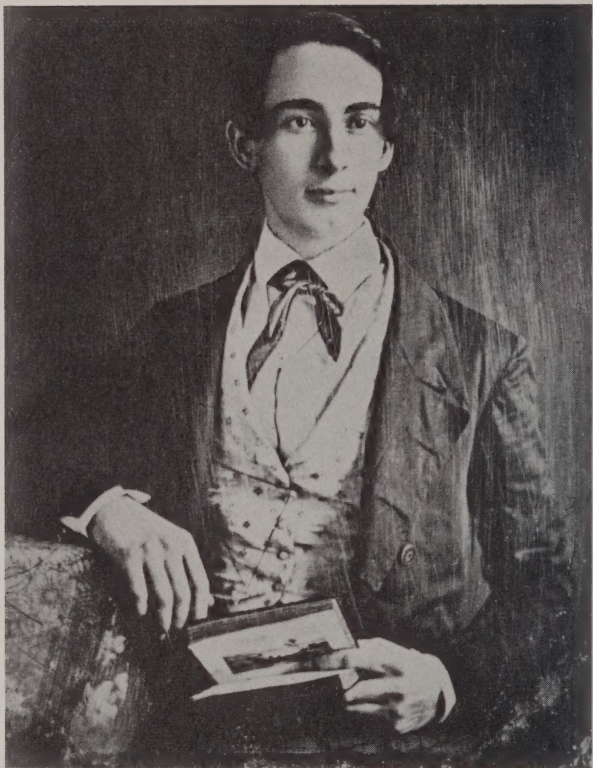
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HENRY M. WHITNEY



Courtesy, Hawaiian Mission Children's Society

HENRY M. WHITNEY AS A YOUNG MAN

Henry M. Whitney

Pioneer Printer-Publisher
&
Hawaii's First Postmaster


By Meiric K. Dutton

MDCCCCLV

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HONOLULU

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IHO LIHO WAS KING of the Hawaiian Islands in 1824 when, on the 5th of June, a second son was born to Samuel and Mercy Partridge Whitney at Waimea on the island of Kauai. Reigning as Kamehameha II, the king had sailed for England the previous November with Queen Kamamalu and the royal suite. Liholiho's brother, Kauikeaouli, was nearing his eleventh birthday and had been named to succeed the king in the event of the latter's death abroad; the dowager queen Kaahumanu was regent as well as kuhina-nui; and Kalanimoku, as principal minister of state, shared with Kaahumanu the reins of government.

Keeaumoku, governor of Kauai, had died that spring; and Kauai's hereditary king, Kaumualii, who had spent his last three years as virtual prisoner of Liholiho on the island of Oahu, died two months later. The latter's son, George Prince Kaumualii, had been sent to America as a youth, had served as a sailor in the American navy and, later, had studied at the Foreign Mission School at Cornwall, Conn. He accompanied the pioneer group of American missionaries on the brig *Thaddeus* when they came to Hawaii in 1820. Samuel and Mercy Whitney, together with the other missionaries of this first company, won the enduring friendship and support of King Kau-

mualii as a result of their kindness to the young prince. George, however, had never seriously embraced Christianity and, by 1824, was living in much the original native style and his position had degenerated into that of a minor chief in the little valley of Wahiawa on Kauai. His wretched condition made him ripe for conspiracy and revolt when the old order passed.

Samuel and Mercy Whitney, together with Samuel and Nancy Ruggles, had initiated the Waimea mission of the American Board of Foreign Missions on July 25, 1820. The Ruggles family was transferred to Hilo in January of 1824, and the Whitneys were alone on Kauai. Unrest was building up on the lonely island following the death of its governor, and was to increase at the end of May when Kaumualii was to die. On June 26, just one month after Kaumualii's death, this unrest was to be further heightened by the superstitious awe with which the natives viewed a total eclipse of the sun. Even before these latter two events, Mr. Bingham wrote, "It being deemed advisable, from the solitariness of Mr. and Mrs. Whitney at Kauai, and the state of the island which they now occupied alone, that I and Mrs. B. should join them for a time." They arrived at Kauai on May 3.

Thus it was that the Bingham's were there on June 5, 1824, to aid in bringing Henry Martyn Whitney into the world. A month later, on July 4, Samuel Whitney's journal reads, "This day we have given our little son to God, his Saviour, in the ordinance of Baptism. We call him Henry Martyn. May he follow the steps of that

devoted missionary." (Henry Martyn, 1781-1812, was an Anglican missionary who translated the New Testament and Prayer Book into Hindustani, the New Testament and Psalms into Persian, and the Gospels into Judaeo-Persian.)

Henry Whitney was but two months and three days old when savage warfare broke out at the fort, a stone's throw from the Whitney cottage. Samuel Whitney later wrote that the Whitney and Bingham families were awakened at early dawn on Sunday morning, the 8th of August, 1824, by a brisk firing of musketry in the fort. The strong spirit of jealousy and rivalry among the surviving chiefs had resulted in civil war.

Kaumualii's will had preserved the existing division and possession of lands on Kauai. Some chiefs had hoped for a re-distribution in their favor, and had incited their followers and others to open rebellion. George Kaumualii was induced to become leader of the insurgents and led the attack on Waimea's fort which was defended by Kalanimoku's men.

The rebels surprised the guards at the fort and quickly got possession of the magazine and armory. The main body of Kalanimoku's garrison was encamped outside the fort. Joining those inside, they quickly routed the insurgents with a loss of ten rebels and six of the king's men. Meanwhile, the fighting forces were running back and forth before the Whitney cottage, and shot of both parties repeatedly endangered them.

Mr. Whitney and Mr. Bingham were called to the

fort to bury the dead and to bind the wounds of the bleeding. Kalanimoku, who was sending the pilot-boat to Oahu to recruit reinforcements, advised the two mission families to join it to avoid the possible fury of the rebel chiefs who were mostly pagans. The Bingham family had two children, including an infant of six months; and the Whitney family had three children, including Henry Martyn who was two months old. Toward nightfall, the two families entered a double canoe in the river for a dash to the pilot-boat in the roadstead. The canoe was nearly swamped in the surf, destroying their small stores and water, and wetting all their clothing so that there was no means of changing the clothes even of the two infants. Stewart's account of this trip records that the voyage to Oahu took forty-eight hours under these distressing conditions.

Reinforcements reached Kalanimoku in ample time, the rebellion was put down, and, for the first time in Hawaiian history, the victors treated the vanquished with charity — a high tribute to their teachers of but four years. George Kaumualii was subsequently captured alive, restored to his wife and child and, for the safety of Kauai, was sent to Oahu where he remained until his death. After the uprising, the Whitney family returned to Kauai where Samuel resumed his labors, and where Henry Martyn grew to boyhood.

Soon after the civil war on Kauai — on March 9, 1825 — news reached Hawaii of the deaths of Liholiho and Kamamalu in London the previous July. The kingdom

continued under Kaahumanu's regency until her death June 5, 1832 when Kauikeaouli assumed actual kingship as Kamehameha III, with his half-sister, Kinau, as kuhina-nui.

Meanwhile, changes had occurred in the Whitney household. At the close of 1825, Samuel Whitney had written a friend in America, "Owing to want of employment and many other evils in this land attendant on the education of our children, many of the Mission feel it important to send their children over to America. But the questions — When shall they go? How shall we part with them? — are always felt, and by some sufficiently to retain them." While the father was writing this letter, "Mrs. W. has been cutting our little Henry's hair. She sends a lock of it." Henry was then eighteen months old but through ill health, "he had never walked till within a past few days."

In November of 1826, Samuel and Mercy Whitney parted with their older daughter, Maria, the first white girl born at the Sandwich Islands. Under the care of Dr. and Mrs. Abraham Blatchley, she was sent to America to pursue an education. Henry's older brother, Samuel Jr., and Henry himself were torn from their surroundings and dispatched on the same errand about the first of December, 1831, when they sailed from Honolulu on the ship *Cyrus*, Captain Hussey. Family letters tell that Henry's parting was particularly tearful; but the future welfare of the boys required an American education.

Samuel and Henry had grandparents, uncles, aunts and

cousins at Pittsfield, Mass., whom they appear to have visited at times; but it was to Hervey Ely at Rochester, N.Y., that they went to live. Ely or his wife may have been a relative of Mrs. Whitney. At all events, he must have been a good foster-father to Henry who, in 1850, named his first son Hervey Ely in honor of his benefactor.

Henry's failure to join the church and his health were a constant source of worry to his parents as indicated by their letters. On August 19, 1834, the father wrote, "We feel much anxiety on account of your health. Mr. Loomis intimates that it is not very good. Could we hear that you were converted and loved the Lord Jesus Christ, we should feel much relieved." Again, two years later, "I have thought much of a sentence in Mr. Loomis' last letter, he says, 'H— sometimes uses filthy expressions when at play with the children.' The child who can speak filthy words is not very far from using profane language." By August of 1842, however, Henry had embraced the church and his father wrote in January of the following year, "What you say about yourself — your hope in Christ, publicly professing him before men, — your future prospects in the printing business, etc. gives us great pleasure."

It had been Henry's intention to enter college as his brother, Samuel, had. He appears to have progressed well at school. His father wrote in 1836 of Henry's having "been to school at Canandiagua [*sic*]" and was "then on a farm at Ogden." In September of 1841, his father wrote, "We were glad to hear of the progress in your studies etc. but exceedingly pained to learn that you were

deaf. Our thoughts immediately reverted to a distressing sickness you had in your infancy." It had been Henry's expectation to enter college that fall of 1841. Apparently, however, the deafness, which was to be with him throughout his life, was too great a handicap in the classroom so he gave up thoughts of college, and turned his attention to printing as a trade.

On November 16, 1841, his sister Maria wrote him at Rochester, "I hope you like the business better than you did at first." By May of 1845, Henry had located with Harper and Brothers in New York City, probably the best known and most highly respected printing and book publishing house in America. At about this time, letters received by Henry from Hartford and Washington, D.C., indicate that composition was being paid for at the rate of 20 cents to 33 $\frac{1}{3}$ cents per thousand ems.

In May of 1847, Samuel Jr. addressed a letter to Henry at the American Bible House, Printing Room. Apparently the young printer was following the time-honored custom of acquiring varied experience after completing his apprenticeship. It was even hinted in this letter that Henry had written that his circumstances and prospects were such as to warrant his hope of being able soon of commencing business for himself.

It is often encountered in reading later-day reminiscences of printing in Hawaii that Henry M. Whitney had at one time been associated with Colonel Stone's *New York Commercial Advertiser* and that it was this circumstance which later led to his naming the *Pacific Com-*

mercial Advertiser. No correspondence or contemporary record has been found to show that he worked with the New York paper, although he must have respected it to have named his own newspaper as he did.

Throughout these years, the letters reveal no hint of romance in Henry's life. Emily, Henry's younger sister, had been sent to America for an education in 1834. It is from one of her letters, dated September 1, 1848, that there emerges the sole known romantic reference. Emily was in New Haven and wrote to Henry at Rochester berating him for not writing her, and making the accusation that he "had a more attractive correspondent in Brooklyn."

It is surprising to learn from this and from others of Emily's letters, that Henry apparently had returned to Rochester with the intention of buying a farm, although this was contrary to her urging.

Also at some time during 1848, he appears to have written friends or relatives in the Islands of his desire to return there. The office of head printer at the Government printing plant being then vacant, the Royal Privy Council in meeting 14th November 1848 passed the following resolution:

"Resolved that the Minister of Finance be authorized to
"invite Mr. H. M. Whitney to return to his native land,
"offering him employment in the Government printing
"office, and authorizing him to draw on the Treasury if
"necessary a sum for his outfit and passage not to exceed
"\$600."

On the following day, Dr. Gerrit P. Judd, Minister of Finance, wrote Whitney notifying him of this action. The letter, addressed to Whitney at the Bible Society House address, is transcribed in the Finance Department Letter Book in the Archives of Hawaii. Dr. Judd added that "your mother has consulted with me on the subject of your coming out . . . [and] signified her hopes that you would marry before coming, a step which I should think a wise one."

With this assurance of employment in his native land, and having his mother's blessing, Henry Whitney turned to the prospect of matrimony — possibly with the "attractive correspondent in Brooklyn." On June 27, 1849, Henry Martyn Whitney married Catharine Olivia March. The locale of the wedding is not known. Miss March was, however, a native of Portsmouth, N.H.; but it appears more probable that Henry Whitney met her and married her in or near New York City. The marriage is said to have taken place on the very eve of the groom's departure for Honolulu. He sailed from New York by way of Panama and San Francisco; whereas his bride later sailed from Boston, coming around the Horn to Honolulu.

Since Henry Whitney arrived in Honolulu on November 9, 1849, after a 17-day passage from San Francisco, he must have left there October 23. That left 118 days from his wedding date to his departure from San Francisco — an unnecessarily long time for the journey from New York by way of Panama.

Catharine March Whitney sailed from Boston on Sep-

tember 23, or 89 days after her wedding day. She arrived at Honolulu January 29, 1850, in the American ship *Carolus*, Captain Dunbar, 127 days from Boston.

Upon arrival at Honolulu, the young printer appears to have set to work immediately at the Government printing plant, a principal product of which was the weekly government-controlled newspaper, *The Polynesian*. Edwin O. Hall was editor of the paper and continued in that capacity until June 30, 1855 when Charles Gordon Hopkins assumed editorship.

The Polynesian was not unknown to Henry Whitney. His father had subscribed to it for him in 1841 and wrote, "There is nothing of particular interest passing now at the Islands except what you will get from the 'Polynesian,' a paper printed at Oahu, which I have ordered sent you. There is much in the paper that I could wish were better."

Henry Whitney and his bride first set up housekeeping in Honolulu in an adobe house, thatched with pili grass, which had been built in the front yard of what is known as the Chamberlain house. Here their first child, Hervey, was born. Little is known of the actual work at the Government printing office, but it is interesting to speculate that the young printer may have tried his hand at writing at this early stage since an interesting serial account of travel from New York to San Francisco via Panama appears in *The Polynesian* of December 8, 15 and 22, 1849, and January 12, 1850. Perhaps this was an actual record of his travels although the articles are unsigned.

In civic affairs, Henry Whitney soon took an active part. On December 22, 1850, little more than a year after his return, he became Hawaii's first postmaster, holding the office through June 30, 1856. Hawaii's postal system had been provided for in the second of the organic acts drafted by Attorney General John Ricord and enacted in 1846, but was not put on an official basis until the close of 1850. In the absence of official mail packets, an unofficial exchange of mails between the United States and Hawaii was initiated. Under the authority of a law enacted by the legislature of 1851, Postmaster Whitney issued, on October 1, 1851, the first Hawaiian postage stamps—the famous, rare and nearly priceless "Missionaries" in denominations of 2, 5 and 13 cents. In May of 1853, still under his regime, the Kamehameha III or "Boston Engraved" issue appeared. It may also be recorded here that Whitney was reappointed Postmaster General on February 16, 1883, and served until April 15, 1886. During this latter period, he installed the first street letter boxes in Honolulu, although they were removed by his successor and not re-established until May of 1895.

During his first term as postmaster, Henry Whitney appears to have continued his employment at *The Polynesian*. The post office was located in the same building as the newspaper. By September of 1853, he had added a book and stationery store to his other activities. Periodically over the succeeding years, his advertisements as well as news notes in *The Friend* evidenced his growth as a

book dealer. Early in 1878, advertisements appeared announcing Hervey E. Whitney and J. W. Robertson as "successors to H. M. Whitney."

During these years, Henry Whitney also engaged in publishing. Among his earliest ventures in this line was the 1855 issuance of "English and Hawaiian Words and Phrases" by A. Bishop. This useful volume ran through several editions. In 1872, he issued the fourth edition (it being the second edition published in Hawaii) of James Jackson Jarves' "History of the Sandwich Islands;" and, in 1875, "The Hawaiian Guide Book for Travelers," probably Hawaii's first Baedeker. His greatest publishing achievement, however, was the issuance of Lorrin Andrews' "A Dictionary of the Hawaiian Language" in 1865. It contains over 15,500 Hawaiian words rendered into English, as well as a vocabulary list of about 4000 English words rendered into Hawaiian. It was sold to subscribers at five dollars the copy, of which one dollar was a royalty to the Rev. Mr. Andrews.

Henry Whitney's farming experience in New York State was reflected in his interest in agricultural affairs of the Islands. He was a charter member of the Royal Hawaiian Agricultural Society, and read an essay on the "Benefits of Agricultural Associations" at the founding meeting of the society in 1850. He was active on committees of the organization throughout its life. Beginning in 1855, he tried earnestly to create an interest in large-scale cotton growing in the Islands through the distribution of choice seed. By 1863, the export figure

for cotton was 3,122 pounds; in 1866, when the largest amount for any one year was exported, the total was only 22,289 pounds.

In 1886, Henry Whitney became editor of the *Planters' Monthly*, a position which he filled faithfully until April of 1903.

In *The Friend* for June of 1856, there appeared a "Prospectus of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*," it being a statement of Mr. Whitney's proposal to publish a weekly journal, the first number of which was to appear Wednesday, July 2, 1856. It announced that "the necessity for a reliable domestic Newspaper, devoted to inter-island Commerce, Agriculture and the whaling interests in the Pacific, and independent of Government control and patronage, has long existed." Henry Whitney had left *The Polynesian* and had resigned as postmaster. His first editorial in the new journal asserted: "Thank Heaven, the day at length has dawned when the Hawaiian Nation can boast a free press, untrammelled by government patronage or party pledges, unbiased by ministerial frowns or favors."

The first two issues of the new journal consisted of 1500 copies each as stated in the July 24 issue; and the entire editions were exhausted. At the close of the third week, there were 494 copies regularly subscribed for, including about 75 native subscribers. *The Polynesian* of July 5, 1856, lauded especially the excellence of printing in the new paper, saying, "In uniformity of appearance and typographical neatness our contemporary altogether

distances the *Polynesian*, for the office was ordered out entire, and not like ours got together by parcels as opportunity offered or necessity drove."

Maddeningly, no contemporary description of the actual press on which the paper was printed has been located, although the logical assumption is that it was a Washington hand press. Later reminiscences dramatically tell of a "new power press;" that "the wheels began to revolve, and the papers to reel off;" and that "The press was an Isaac Adams New Patent book press, and the outfit was ready for the first issue in July, 1856." Actually, the first issue of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* to be printed on the "Adams New Patent Power Press" was that of April 2, 1857. *The Friend* of March 31, 1857, had first been printed on this press by Mr. Whitney's force, and it said of the press: "It is the first press of this description ever worked at the islands, and, of course, is far ahead of anything in the shape of a printing press ever before seen here. It is not worked by steam, but there is no predicting how soon steam power may do our *printing*, as it is now doing our *dredging*." During the first two years of operation, Mr. Whitney paid out the sum of \$21,808.74 to commence and maintain the newspaper.

The young publisher's first month at the business was very nearly his last according to an article in *The Polynesian* of Saturday, July 19, 1856, which reported: "Mr. H. M. Whitney of the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser*, met with an accident while boarding the *Fanny Major*, on Tuesday morning. When Mr. Whitney went along

side, and as he was preparing to get on deck his boat went from under him and was capsized. He had a rope in his hand, to which he held fast, and being drawn under the barque's counter his life was for sometime in imminent danger. When rescued he was quite insensible."

This encounter with the sea was reminiscent of an experience his father had had on the voyage of the brig *Thaddeus*. Feeling the need of some exercise, Samuel Whitney joined the officers in painting. The rope by which he held gave way, and the missionary was plunged into the ocean. According to Mrs. Whitney's manuscript log for March 27, 1820, the brig was "sailing six miles an hour: but no sooner was it known that he was in the water, then the sails were turned and the vessel stopped. The boat was immediately let down. By this time the vessel had drifted a considerable distance from him; but previous to this, he had caught hold of a bench which was thrown over for his relief; and God was pleased to spare his life until other means were used to rescue him from danger and death."

Henry Whitney's role as editor-publisher and as manager of newspapers throughout his long career from 1856 to 1870 and from 1873 to 1894 was liberally sprinkled with the spice of libel suits, and with caustic attacks on him by contemporary journals. These were the natural result of a strong-willed man conducting an independent journal in a community composed of individuals of widely diversified nationalistic, religious and cultural backgrounds. He generally represented the local American

community, especially those persons of Yankee heritage and of the missionary strain.

He hated the hula, and conducted periodic campaigns against it. He strongly supported the Union cause during the civil war in the United States and is reported to have been assaulted for his pains. His most serious trouble of this initial period of the *Advertiser*, however, began in the fall of 1868 when he started a campaign against certain features of the contract labor system under which Chinese and Japanese laborers were engaged in their native lands to come to Hawaii under contract. Most particularly, he opposed the government's direct participation in the importation of these laborers. He continued for two years this fight against the planters, a group which he had normally championed. In August of 1870, a group of planters met on Maui and resolved to do all they could to reduce the circulation of the *Advertiser*. A month later, Mr. Whitney sold the *Advertiser* to Black & Auld who completely reversed his stand on contract labor. Mr. Whitney later denied that the sale of the paper at this time was due to the action of the Maui planters.

It was also in that earlier period of *Advertiser* history that Whitney enjoyed, for a period of about four months, frequent association with the great humorist, Mark Twain, who arrived in Honolulu March 18, 1866 and sailed back to California July 19 of the same year. Henry Whitney was among the closest of the new friends Twain made in Hawaii. A third of a century later, Whitney referred particularly to Twain's many visits to the *Advertiser*

office as among "the many pleasant incidents which have occurred during this paper's prosperous life." The humorous by-play between Whitney and Mark Twain is admirably presented in Chapter X of Judge Walter Frear's book, "Mark Twain and Hawaii."

Ka Nupepa Kuokoa (The Independent Newspaper) was established by Henry M. Whitney in October of 1861, and it began regular weekly publication the following January. This was by far the most successful of the many attempts to give Hawaii a permanent newspaper in the native language. It finally expired at the close of 1927. The Christmas issue of *The Honolulu Advertiser* that year announced its passing in a page-1 editorial by Lorrin A. Thurston, president of the Advertiser Publishing Company.

In addition to running an English-language and a Hawaiian-language newspaper and conducting a book and stationery store, Mr. Whitney also conducted a thriving job printing business. In 1858, the missionaries found it impracticable to continue running the Mission Press which had initiated printing in Hawaii on January 7, 1822. They turned to Mr. Whitney's establishment for their printing requirements; and, in 1859, they sold to the *Advertiser* all their equipment and supplies in return for a credit of \$1300 against their future printing needs. Thus it was that the *Advertiser* became the direct descendant of Hawaii's first printing plant.

On the first of May, 1871, Mr. Whitney and his wife and daughter sailed for a six-month sojourn in the Eastern

States. Soon after his return, advertisements and notices appeared in *The Friend* telling of the "rare subscription books" Mr. Whitney's bookstore was offering for sale.

The newspaper field, however, continued to hold Henry Whitney's main interest, and he cast about for a new vehicle. *The Polynesian* was no longer in existence, it having ceased as a government publication on November 2, 1861, and as a private venture on February 6, 1864. However, the *Hawaiian Gazette* had been started in January of 1865 as an official organ of the government, and it was this paper which passed into the hands of Henry Whitney on April 1, 1873. *The Friend* in its April issue recorded: "The *Gazette* 'Extra' of yesterday is indicative that there is 'a new hand at the bellows.' By the last issue of that paper we learn that Hon. H. M. Whitney has leased the Government printing establishment, and will hereafter publish and edit the *Gazette* on his own responsibility. The Hawaiian Government has no longer a printing press to provide for."

On May 26, 1888, "the *Pacific Commercial Advertiser* and its office became part and parcel of the Hawaiian Gazette Company," according to *The Friend*. The *Advertiser* had become a daily May 1, 1882; and was continued as a daily paper with, for many years, the *Gazette* as a weekly and, later, a semi-weekly issue. Mr. Whitney continued in active control of the management of the company and its papers until his retirement September 10, 1894, although he did not continue throughout that time in the capacity of editor.

A year and a half later, on February 12, 1896, Henry Whitney's wife, Catharine March Whitney, died at the age of 70 years. She had been for thirty-five years a leading member of the old Bethel Church, active on the Woman's Board of Missions and in the Stranger's Friend Society. Her death came as a release from four long years of illness.

Mr. Whitney continued living at his Piikoi Street home, taking an active interest in community affairs until his death from heart failure at eleven o'clock on the morning of August 17, 1904. His passing was sudden. According to the *Advertiser* of the next morning, "Although eighty years of age, Mr. Whitney was robust and active to within a few hours of his end. No doctor attended him until yesterday."

During the fifty-five years following his return to the islands in 1849, Henry Whitney had been a leading force in the community. He had been a member of the Privy Council of State from 1873 to 1891; and was elected representative to the legislature of 1855. During the reign of King Lunalilo, he prepared and presented to the king a document in which it was suggested that Pearl Harbor be leased to the United States for a term of fifty years as a consideration for a reciprocity treaty.

On the passing of Henry M. Whitney, Sereno Bishop wrote in *The Friend*: "Personally he was an attractive and lovable man, of somewhat impressive appearance, and retaining to the last of his 80 years his erectness and a good degree of his animation and activity. It was the

writer's privilege to meet him on the street two days before his sudden death. He seemed full of cheer, although expecting, as he said, soon to become totally blind, an affliction from which he has been happily and painlessly taken away into the light of Heaven."

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